

Message

From: EPA News [noreply@cision.com]
Sent: 10/18/2021 12:30:47 PM
To: Harris, Michael [harris.michael@epa.gov]
Subject: EPA Chicago - Weekend Media Report - Monday, October 18, 2021

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Report Overview:
















Total Clips (14)
























Grants (2)

Water - Drinking (1)













Water - Surface (8)


Other (3)

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| Grants (2) | | | | |
|  EPA announces ECU among recipients of \$3.8 million in grant | 10/16/2021 | ADA News Online | IL |   |
|  DeWine announces \$3.7 million in H2Ohio Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grants | 10/15/2021 | Highland County Press Online | OH |   |
| Water - Drinking (1) | | | | |
|  State criticized for water response in Benton Harbor; Corrosion treatment failed to control harmful lead levels | 10/14/2021 | Detroit News, The | MI |   |
| Water - Surface (8) | | | | |
|  Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis | 10/17/2021 | KWLM-AM | MN |   |
|  Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid | 10/17/2021 | WPHM-AM Online | MI |   |

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|--|--|------------|-------------------------------|----|---|
|  | drinking water crisis Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis | 10/17/2021 | WSJM | MI |    |
|  | Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis | 10/17/2021 | Daily Dodge | WI |    |
|  | Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis - 1330 & 95.5 WFIN | 10/17/2021 | 1330 WFIN | OH |    |
|  | Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis Mix 102.7 WCPZ | 10/17/2021 | North Coast Journal - WCPZ-FM | OH |    |
|  | New details released on replacement of water pipes in Benton Harbor | 10/17/2021 | WSBT-TV Online | IN |    |
|  | New pipes vowed in Benton Harbor; State promises to find cash needed to replace lead lines in 18 months | 10/17/2021 | Detroit News, The | MI |   |

Other (3)

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|--|---|------------|---------------------------|----|---|
|  | Ohio Department of Agriculture extends H2Ohio deadline to plant cover crops | 10/16/2021 | Crescent-News Online, The | OH |    |
|  | Biden appoints Debra Shore to lead EPA Midwestern office | 10/13/2021 | Chippewa Herald Online | WI |    |
|  | Biden appoints Debra Shore to lead EPA Midwestern office | 10/13/2021 | Dispatch/Argus Online | IA |    |

News Headline: EPA announces ECU among recipients of \$3.8 million in grant | 

News Date: 10/16/2021

Outlet Full Name: ADA News Online

Outlet State: IL

News Text: Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is announcing East Central University in Ada, Okla., is among ten organizations...

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News Headline: DeWine announces \$3.7 million in H2Ohio Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Grants | 


News Date: 10/15/2021

Outlet Full Name: Highland County Press Online

Outlet State: OH

News Text: ...Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and Ohio Lake Erie...

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News Headline: State criticized for water response in Benton Harbor; Corrosion treatment failed to control harmful lead levels | 

News Date: 10/14/2021

Outlet Full Name: Detroit News, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: "Michigan has the strongest lead in drinking water regulation in the nation, so how did another majority Black city get to three years of elevated lead levels in drinking water without anybody really batting an eye?"

Nick Leonard

Executive director of the Great Lakes Environmental Law

State and city officials treated Benton Harbor's drinking water with a corrosion chemical blend that failed to control harmful levels of lead for more than two years and rejected federal requirements to fully study its effectiveness.

As state officials waited to see if the treatment reduced lead to acceptable levels, they didn't warn Benton Harbor residents that their water was unsafe or provide alternatives, such as bottled water, until late September.

They provided water filters, but critics said not enough effort was put into showing residents how to properly install them - a point that two state environmental officials acknowledge. While state officials maintain they are seeing improvements, only last week did they recommend using only bottled water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth.

Those failures and delays are among the reasons a group of concerned residents, safe water advocates and environmentalists have filed an emergency petition seeking federal intervention to restore safe drinking water to this impoverished, majority-Black southwest Michigan city of 9,615 residents.

"Michigan has the strongest lead in drinking water regulation in the nation, so how did another majority Black city get to three years of elevated lead levels in drinking water without anybody really batting an eye?" said Nick Leonard, executive director of the Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, one of the petitioners to get the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency involved in Benton Harbor.

Local, state and federal officials need to take a hard look at why the crisis in Benton Harbor happened, especially during the Whitmer administration, he said.

The polyphosphate blend the city began using in March 2019 - and adjusted the dosage a year later - has not lowered Benton Harbor's levels of lead below the state and federal action levels. In 2018, when Benton Harbor recorded its first year of the lead exceedance, eight homes tested above the federal action level of 15 parts per billion - the highest at 60 ppb - compared with this year's readings, when 11 homes tested above 15 ppb with the highest coming in at 889 ppb.

The citywide reading in 2018 was 22 ppb compared with 24 ppb in this year's sampling.

The lead situation in Benton Harbor, a predominately African American city, comes only a few years after the Flint water crisis discovery and promises from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer that safe drinking water would be a central theme of her administration. Her predecessor, Gov. Rick Snyder, was roundly criticized and criminally charged for the lead-tainted water scandal in Flint.

Elin Betanzo, a Metro Detroit water quality specialist and former EPA official who helped uncover the Flint water crisis, said the continued exceedances of the action levels show the state's approach isn't working in Benton Harbor. And there was no "meaningful public outreach" explaining to people that the water wasn't safe to drink, she said.

"The fact that it hasn't been approached with any urgency and it's just been drawn out for so long makes me concerned that we haven't learned anything from the Flint water crisis, and we haven't made the changes necessary to ensure that a community has access to safe water to drink every day," Betanzo said.

But Liesl Clark, director of the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, said statistics show lead levels are coming down and that Benton Harbor may soon stop exceeding the lead action level. "We want to get the lead out," she said.

State officials cited statistics that show since the city's lead exceedance was first recorded in 2018, the percentage of samples where no lead was detected almost doubled, from 17% to 33%. The percentage of samples with less than 10 ppb also improved from 60% in 2018 to 79% in 2021.

But Betanzo disagrees, saying the data doesn't show lead levels are declining, as state officials argue.

The 90th percentile amount of lead is consistently above 20 ppb and the maximum lead level detected has been steadily increasing during each six-month sampling period, ending at a high of 889 ppb, Betanzo said. The 90th percentile is a metric used to characterize the range of lead in the community that considers all the samples together.

"Their job is compliance," said Betanzo, noting Benton Harbor has been consistently above 15 ppb for three straight years.

The samples with the higher lead readings might have been from the same homes that were sampled before, said Eric Oswald, who heads ELGE's drinking water and environmental health division, adding that the treatment plant operator in charge at the time "wouldn't give us the addresses that they were taking lead and copper samples from."

That operator, Michael O'Malley, was fired by the state last year "because he was really impeding our progress on some of the data we were trying to get," he said. O'Malley could not be reached for comment.

EGLE last month appointed a new clean water public advocate and last week announced the creation of a drinking water advisory panel. On Monday, the state health department said it was providing free blood lead testing and home services for residents to help them address sources of lead in their homes.

"We think there's an important sense of urgency, and that's why we're talking about these action steps that are being taken immediately," said Clark, referencing bottled water distribution as well as going door-to-door to distribute water filters. "One of the most important pieces is that this is a historical challenge for us in Michigan. We are very open to understanding what we could have done better, how can we learn from this."

Experts have determined there is no safe level of lead consumption, and adults exposed to lead in drinking water can develop problems in bones, teeth, blood, liver, kidney and the brain. In children, lead is more of a health risk and can affect their brains and growing bodies.

EGLE should have told residents three years ago "that the water was bad, that it was not drinkable," said the Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the Benton Harbor Community Water Council, who has been complaining for years to city and state officials.

"That was the No. 1 thing that they could have come out and said, 'Do not drink the water.' But they failed to do so," Pinkney said. "They are in denial. You never hear them talk about how bad the water is ... in three years. That's criminal."

EPA officials have declined to address specifics of the emergency petition, filed Sept. 9, or whether the state should be held accountable. But they said they share the concerns of Benton Harbor residents about lead in their water.

"EPA's highest priority is protecting the people of Benton Harbor from lead exposure in drinking water," said Elizabeth Cisar, a senior adviser in EPA's Office of Water. "EPA is committed to working with the state of Michigan, providing oversight and technical support to ensure all residents have access to bottled water and/or using filters properly."

Corrosion control

The water treatment plant in Benton Harbor that went into service in 1927 has had its share of problems as described in the state's 2018 Sanitary Survey review.

The sanitary survey found eight "significant deficiencies," especially in areas of the treatment and distribution system. The maintenance of the water plant and distribution system components was "severely lacking," according to the review.

Unlike Flint, where the state's environmental department did not urge applying proper corrosion-control chemicals to the city's new, more acidic river water source in 2014, Benton Harbor gets its water from nearby Lake Michigan. And it hasn't changed its water source. The situation has puzzled state experts.

"Any amount of lead in drinking water concerns me," Oswald said. "Benton Harbor was an interesting case. There was no source change, there was no treatment change. It's one of those things where you scratch your head and wonder, 'Well, what happened? Why are you seeing these elevated numbers all of a sudden?'"

While he regrets that Benton Harbor has had three years of lead exceedances, the state did all it could, Oswald said. The city's treatment plant, he said, was not originally designed to have corrosion control treatment injected into the system.

Environmental groups said in the emergency petition to the EPA that the state's use of corrosion inhibitor was used without studying it - a recommendation made by the EPA but rejected by state officials as too costly and lengthy.

Oswald said that type of thorough EPA corrosion control study would take years and is expensive. "The concern was, we had an ALE (action level exceedance). We wanted to get some level of corrosion control inhibitor in the system as soon as we possibly could and be conservative about how we did it," he said.

That approach included a smaller study and using a corrosion control for a year from March 2019 to March 2020 that "we realized it wasn't as effective as we had hoped it would be," Oswald said. "And we changed the blend."

"I think it is working. It just takes time to passivate and stabilize a system," he said.

But the EPA intervention petition said Benton Harbor began a corrosion control study in August - 30 months after the state ordered the city to use corrosion control treatment that wasn't working. One of the bidders for that study noted "the \$50,000 budget is not enough to perform an adequate study," according to the petition.

The petition also claims EGLE violated the state and federal lead and copper rule by delaying "a fully compliant corrosion control study."

The EPA guidance manual states that if a water system uses a polyphosphate, it should be studied, especially in a system with lead service lines, Betanzo said.

"It's like right there as clear as day, and EGLE rejected that advice and chose to do it their own way," she said.

Trust broken

City resident Carmela Patton, 43, said EGLE "has really failed us" and isn't convinced state officials can be trusted to get the lead out of the drinking water.

"They never told us the water was unsafe," said Patton, who said her skin was starting to itch because of the water.

"You know how Flint blew up? We didn't get blown up (with the attention) like that. It's heartbreaking, it's sad. It makes you feel unappreciated as a person, like nobody cares."

The state and others were also slow to inform the Benton Harbor public about how to properly use the filters to maximize their effectiveness, resulting in residents not placing them on their faucets, according to residents and environmentalists.

The state has been trying to rebuild trust by distributing bottled water - more than 33,000 cases since Sept. 30 through Wednesday, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services. And nearly 2,600 filters have been passed out since 2019 with roughly 3,000 municipal water customers, state officials said.

Oswald admitted, in hindsight, just giving out water filters and making public announcements "may not have been enough."

Regina Strong, the environmental justice public advocate for EGLE who has been leading the filter distribution effort in Benton Harbor, admitted to some mistakes with distribution but "now we're moving forward full blast."

"There were filters available, but access was an issue for some people, how it was distributed, where it was, so we're trying to work to correct all that moving forward," Strong said.

The removal of lead lines, environmentalists contend, would help eliminate the need for corrosion treatments, but the replacement effort has been slow. To date, 219 lines have been replaced with 100 more expected by next April. There are an estimated 2,400 lead lines in the city.

Clark, EGLE's director, said there hasn't been enough investment in water infrastructure around the state and especially in Benton Harbor. Whitmer pledged to get all the lead pipes removed in five years or less, which some say isn't fast enough.

Whitmer recently signed into law a \$10 million appropriation for lead pipe removal in Benton Harbor. The state is budgeting \$20 million for the five-year removal process.

Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad said meetings are underway to get millions of more dollars in a bid to get the lead pipes out in months instead of years in a partnership with the city and state.

"I'm not the official that's going to play the blame game. My focus is on solutions," Muhammad said. "Because this problem, it was inherited. I can't speak for EGLE. I'm working with EGLE. And if there were mistakes made on their end, then they have to be accountable and responsible for that."

lfleming@detroitnews.com

Twitter: @leonardnfleming

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City resident Carmela Patton

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis | 


News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: KWLM-AM

Outlet State: MN

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis |  

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: WPHM-AM Online

Outlet State: MI

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis |  

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: WSJM

Outlet State: MI

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis |  



News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Daily Dodge

Outlet State: WI

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis - 1330 & 95.5 WFIN |  

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: 1330 WFIN

Outlet State: OH

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: Michigan to replace lead pipes in Benton Harbor in 18 months amid drinking water crisis | Mix 102.7


News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: North Coast Journal - WCPZ-FM

Outlet State: OH

News Text: ...directive. Advocates in the city had filed an emergency petition to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Sept. 9...

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News Headline: New details released on replacement of water pipes in Benton Harbor | 


News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: WSBT-TV Online

Outlet State: IN

News Text: ...lead out" in Benton Harbor. New details tonight on replacing the city's water pipes in the next 18 months. As we first reported,...

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News Headline: New pipes vowed in Benton Harbor; State promises to find cash needed to replace lead lines in 18 months | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Detroit News, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: Benton Harbor - Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist vowed Thursday that the state will find millions of dollars needed to replace lead service lines in 18 months, calling it an "appropriate escalation" to address the city's ongoing lead-tainted water crisis.

The "all-hands-on-deck" effort is part of an executive directive by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office that will continue delivery of bottled water, health care, home lead pipe replacement and other services for Benton Harbor residents, Gilchrist said during a Thursday press conference in the southwest Michigan community of 9,615 residents.

The Democratic Whitmer administration's announcement, which has followed extensive criticism by residents and environmental groups about delays in addressing the city's water crisis, is faster than a prior plan to budget \$20 million for a five-year removal process. Whitmer recently signed a budget bill with a \$10 million appropriation for Benton Harbor lead pipe replacement.

Gilchrist identified "a significant amount of federal resources that have yet to be appropriated" by the Legislature as the source for additional cash. The federal aid can be used for infrastructure projects such as removing lead pipes, he said. A governor's office release said additional money would be tapped from "federal, state and local resources."

"When a community faces tough times, we have to show up for and with them to fight for and with them with everything that we have," Gilchrist said. "Because we are all part of the same Michigan family."

Despite a lack of public warnings that the lead-tainted water was unsafe following three straight years of lead exceedances, the lieutenant governor maintained that the state has always taken Benton Harbor's lead issues seriously. His remarks came on the same day The Detroit News reported that state environmental officials had been slow to respond to dealing with the crisis by not warning residents that the drinking water was unsafe and that its corrosion control measures did not work.

"I think what's important to recognize is today's action represent, I think, an appropriate escalation of that response," said Gilchrist when asked about the state's delayed action. "We know that no amount of lead in the water is safe. So this action that we've taken today...we believe has escalated the state response to meet this challenge."

"What happened in the past" is in the past, and the administration is moving forward, he added.

Following years of criticism, residents and environmental groups are seeking federal intervention in the impoverished Michigan city. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 5 is reviewing the petition. It follows three consecutive years of lead-in-water results that have exceeded state and federal action levels.

Critics respond

One of the petitioners welcomed the Whitmer administration's promise to get the pipes out of the ground expeditiously. But the people long ago "should have been told the water was unsafe to drink" by Whitmer, the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and Benton Harbor's mayor, said the Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the Benton Harbor Community Water Council.

Pinkney did not attend Gilchrist's news conference because he was passing out bottled water at his church - something he has done since March 2019 given the lead exceedances.

Pinkney said he appreciates the governor "doing everything that we laid out" in the petition "to make us happy," but he insisted residents still need to hear definitively the water is unsafe to drink. The state health department has said it's passing out free bottled water and other services out of "an abundance of caution."

"Don't beat around the bush talk about we're doing this because of cautionary reasons," Pinkney said. "That doesn't work. Now you're still pretending that there's not a problem. Even today, nothing would have happened had we not filed that petition."

While state officials maintain they are seeing improvements in reducing some lead levels in Benton Harbor, only last week did they recommend that residents only use bottled water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth.

Experts have determined there is no safe level of lead consumption, and adults exposed to lead in drinking water can develop problems in bones, teeth, blood, liver, kidney and the brain. In children, lead is more of a health risk and can affect their brains and growing bodies.

"Gov. Whitmer's executive directive reflects urgent community priorities of securing safe water and removing lead water pipes. NRDC is committed to working with Benton Harbor residents and state officials to move this plan forward," said Cyndi Roper, senior Michigan advocate with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

One Republican legislative leader indicated support for directing more aid toward replacing Benton Harbor's lead pipes while criticizing two years of Whitmer administration inaction.

"Lead line replacement is a long-term solution that absolutely must be achieved," said Abby Mitch, a spokeswoman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, citing a Senate GOP plan for spending \$600 million in federal dollars on statewide lead line replacement compared with a \$200 million Whitmer plan.

A Senate hearing on the GOP plan is set for Wednesday.

To date, 219 lines in Benton Harbor have been replaced. There are an estimated 2,400 lead lines in the city.

Lack of warning resonates

The pastors who flanked Gilchrist at the rainy news conference at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Berrien County office on Thursday had concerns about the lack of a state warning about the drinking water even as they welcomed Whitmer's actions.

While lauding the state for making bottled water and filters available to residents, the clergy members wondered in response to reporters' questions why they just found out a few weeks ago that the city had three straight years of lead exceedances.

That question has been brought up "more than once," said Bishop James Atterberry of Brotherhead Church, and "the truth of the matter is that they really don't know what happened."

Benton Harbor has had three consecutive years of lead levels in its water that have exceeded state and federal action levels of 15 parts per billion. The high readings have continued despite an effort by state agencies to have the city inject a corrosion control blend into the drinking water. The citywide reading in 2018 was 22 ppb compared with 24 ppb in this year's sampling.

"It kinda went from one day (water was clean) to a situation where we had to have bottled water," Atterberry said. "The information we are getting now is coming from those in charge, and they're saying that they didn't see that it was that bad."

The Rev. Maurice McAfee, the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, said he also wondered "why the information was so late in getting out to us."

While getting lead pipes out of the ground and cleaning up the water is paramount, McAfee said he wants to "backtrack and figure out how did we get to the point to make sure it never happens again."

"This is the first time in the last couple of weeks that we heard it was three years," he said, referring to the lead exceedances. "We're learning as we go."

Mayor Marcus Muhammad said the city has been working to solve the lead pipe problem "with the resources and the money that we had." Now "the all-out effort from the state" will allow the city to "really intensify in solving the problem," he said.

Muhammad said the city campaign for bottled water began in 2018 after 30 homes had exceeded the federal lead limit. The state began distributing bottled water almost three years later on Sept. 30.

Pinkney attacked the mayor as being complicit in not sounding the alarm.

Muhammad knew about the lead situation in 2018, 2019 and 2020, Pinkney said, adding that "he was telling people that the water was good to drink, and he knew it wasn't."

Muhammad said at the press conference that, with the corrosion control, "that takes time to work." The city was under state emergency management control in 2017, a year before the first lead exceedance, he added.

"But we're not going to look backwards. We're going to look forward, because it's on my watch, it's on Gov. Whitmer's watch and we're going to solve it once and for all," Muhammad said.

Republicans weigh in

The state Department of Health and Human Services will continue to provide educational outreach, water sampling and filter distribution, Director Elizabeth Hertel said.

"No matter where a person lives, no matter their identity, their name; everyone, and I want to repeat that, everyone deserves access to water that they can trust to drink themselves and that they can trust to give to their families," Hertel said.

Since Sept. 30, the state Department of Health and Human Services has delivered more than 33,500 cases of bottled water to city residents. It also has distributed hundreds of water filters, but early efforts were criticized as not doing enough to educate residents on how to install the devices.

The national and state Republican parties signaled Thursday they are making the lead-tainted water crisis in Benton Harbor a campaign issue.


"While it is about time Gretchen Whitmer takes a closer look at the situation in Benton Harbor, where Michiganders have been without access to clean and safe drinking water, the timeliness of her addressing this issue raises far more questions," Michigan Republican Party spokesman Gustavo Portela said in a statement.

"Whitmer and her administration's inaction in addressing this issue is yet another failed promise to add to the growing list, and this one comes with catastrophic implications for the residents of Benton Harbor."

The first year of results that exceeded state and federal action limits occurred in the final year of the Republican administration of Gov. Rick Snyder, who has been criminally charged by Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel's office in the Flint water crisis.

lfleming@detroitnews.com

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News Headline: Ohio Department of Agriculture extends H2Ohio deadline to plant cover crops | 


News Date: 10/16/2021

Outlet Full Name: Crescent-News Online, The

Outlet State: OH

News Text: ...a collaboration involving ODA, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Lake Erie...

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News Headline: Biden appoints Debra Shore to lead EPA Midwestern office | 


News Date: 10/13/2021

Outlet Full Name: Chippewa Herald Online

Outlet State: WI

News Text: ...Shore, a wastewater treatment official in Chicago, to direct the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Midwestern office. ...

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News Headline: Biden appoints Debra Shore to lead EPA Midwestern office | 

News Date: 10/13/2021

Outlet Full Name: Dispatch/Argus Online

Outlet State: IA

News Text: ...Shore, a wastewater treatment official in Chicago, to direct the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Midwestern office. ...

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